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The Keepers Of the Secrets

Intelligence Veterans Recall the Good Old Spies

By Henry Allen

Once, they were. Princeton lads floating down to midnight Yugoslavia in parachutes. They were card sharks turned cryptanalysts. They were upper-class types looking for a bit of sport out of the war, which was World War II, now nearly as far away from us as the Spanish-American War was from them when the OSS, precursor of the CIA and the whole intelligence community, was founded.

"It was the greatest collection of people, I suppose, in the history of the world," said O.J. Sands, who drove up from Richmond to attend this gathering last night at the National Intelligence Study Center. "People used to say that OSS stood for Oh So Social because of the Morgans and Vanderbilts and so on we had."

Before the OSS, or Office of Strategic Services, we didn't really have an intelligence service. And since then, in the mid '70s, we've asked ourselves whether we needed or wanted one.

This is why the National Intelligence Study Center had its awards ceremony last night surrounded by the paneled walls and equestrian prints of the International Club. It is why, in fact, it was founded four years ago, said founder Ray S. Cline, former deputy director for intelligence at the CIA.

"We wanted to make people in United States understand more clearly and soberly what intelligence is," problem, he said, was the "sensationalism of the [Sen. Frank] Church committee" along with the mood of journalism, memoirs, exposes, analyses of American intelligence uses, "a great deal of which," he "was full of hostility and written a view to sensation."

So for the last three years, the center has been handing out awards to journalists and scholars they felt better ideas. Last night, the winners were: Cord Meyer, former deputy head of overseas operations at the CIA and author of "Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA"; Richard K. Betts, of the Brookings Institution, for three scholarly pieces; and The Wall Street Journal, for articles and editorials on "the need for secrecy, the danger of leaks, and the necessity to upgrade not only intel-

ligence operations but also the interpretive function."

Oddly enough, it may well have been the collapse in the intelligence community's prestige that made this work possible. "It's only in recent years that it's been possible to write stuff that's at all informed," said Betts. "What opened it up was the Senate hearings on intelligence, the Church committee."

The center itself might not have existed had it not been for the committee. "There wouldn't have been the need for it 10 years ago," said retired

ations. You have a cauing, so you have an association. When we got those problems in Congress, these people began to organize and close ranks."

They also like to trade old sea stories, said Cline, and see the old faces again. One man approached prize-winner Betts to tell him: "I was parachuting over Germany before you were born."

They wore little metal decorations in their lapels, the Distinguished Intelligence Medal and so on, this being one of the few gatherings in Washington where they'd be recognized. With their regimental stripes and sack suits they looked like they narrowly missed careers in, say, investment banking. But then, of course, they did.

Nowadays, having survived everything from the Bay of Pigs to congressional investigation, to bitter memoirs, to its own glamor, intelligence has become a comfortable old Washington institution.

Sic transit, well, practically everything.

